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A WILLING REUNION NOT IMPOSSIBLE.

A THANKSGIVING SERMON PREACHED AT ST. PAUL'S, BROOKLINE, NOVEMBER 26, 1863,

BY

REV. FRANCIS WHARTON,

RECTOR OF THE PARISH.

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Brookline, Thanksgiving Day,

November 26*th*, 1863.

Reverend and dear Sir: —

Having listened with great interest to the sermon preached by you this morning, and believing that it is well calculated to promote correct views upon the National affairs of the day, we respectfully request a copy for publication.

AUGUSTUS ASPINWALL,
HARRISON FAY,
JAMES S. AMORY,
J. A. BURNHAM,
AMOS A. LAWRENCE,
FREDERICK P. LADD,
WILLIAM ASPINWALL,
M. C. FERRIS,
HENRY UPHAM,
THOMAS PARSONS,
} Wardens and Vestry of St. Paul's Church.

Rev. FRANCIS WHARTON,
Brookline, Mass.

THANKSGIVING SERMON.

"In the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice." — *Ps.* lxiii. 7.

It is the usage of the divine Word to speak of God's mystery as the believer's peace. Concealment, we are told, is a part of the glory of God; and the very darkness, therefore, in which our path may be enfolded, leads us to trust in God, who is in the cloud. "Thou canst not see my face," said God to Moses, "for there shall no man see me and live." "And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand as I pass by,"— hiding thus from the creature the movement of the Creator, even when the Creator is most near. So the apostle cries, — "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For

of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen." And in the same strain of praise for this, the hiddenness of the providence of God, the Psalmist exclaims, in the words of the text, — "In the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

I think, dear friends, in the first place, that this must be the believer's cry in reference to the shadows that hung over him during former parts of his pilgrimage, but which are now passed. Few of us but must recall moments when we seemed placed in the cleft of the rock; and, like one pent in between the rugged walls and the beetling roof of some dark sea-side cave whose mouth the waves wash, could then see no path of escape. Yet, as we now view these moments of depression or affliction, what is our present cry? Do we not feel that even for these we can praise God? Do we not see that he whose paths are on the sea, and whose footsteps are not known, led us forth by a way of which we knew nothing? "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." We now see that our plans, which we so much cherished, were very different from God's plans, which we did not understand; and that our plans would have led to ruin, but

God's have led to peace. We see that, whenever, in our own presumptuous wisdom, we chose our own path, against his obvious leadings, it led to sorrow, if not to sin; and that God's discipline, which tore us, bleeding as it were, from ties in which we had thus wrapped ourselves, was the way of right and of love. We see that even God's providence of affliction, in removing from us beloved and believing friends, was a providence of mercy, — completing the number of the elect, adding to the glory of heaven, weaning us from earth. We see how even our own sicknesses and disappointments have been blessings, warning us, as we grew older, not to attach ourselves to the transitory things of earth, but to place our affections on heaven. In the shadows of the past we can, therefore, rejoice in the light of experience; and so Faith teaches us to rejoice in the shadow of the present, grievous as may be the affliction or sore the trial. For the shadow is the covering of God's wing.

But if such be the case with personal troubles, how much more strongly must it be so in reference to those which strike, not merely individuals, but nations, — nations whose destiny involves, not only that of multitudes of individual souls, but, in

a large measure, those of Christ's militant church. It is true, that, in our own case, as our country stands on this Thanksgiving day, the shadow over us is not unbroken. We look back, as we close this beautiful autumn, upon a harvest of singular fulness. In no time has wealth poured itself so abundantly upon our great marts; at no former period has the giant growth of our giant country been so marked in this, the favored region in which we live. And we see this growth and this flush not only in our business, but in our educational and ecclesiastical interests. Our schools were never so full, our religious contributions never so large, the mental activity of the country never so great, as now. And yet, as we view all this, we turn with a sigh to the one great and overwhelming grief that overshadows us: a country divided into two hostile camps, and divided by a chasm into which not merely wealth, but life, is swallowed up in the costliest libations; a people, only a few years since united in affection and peace, now apparently separated by an enmity even unto death. In this, the shadow of God's wing on our land, what reason have we to rejoice? By these, the waters of Babylon, — in this, the strange land of discord in which we now find ourselves, —

how can we, as a nation, raise the voice of praise? This question let me now attempt to consider.

And first, in these, our national trials, we are led to contemplate heaven as the sole country which cannot be disturbed, and God as the sole ruler whose supremacy cannot be touched. Each form of human government has been successively shaken to its centre. The military despot, the constitutional king, the little community in which each man has an equal share of power, the vast centralization, where the aristocrat acts and speaks for all; — each, in turn, has yielded to that law which stamps imperfection on all the institutions of man. And now, our own system, of all others the most perfect, — of all others, that which best unites individual liberty with governmental power, — speaks the same lesson. The genius of constitutional liberty stands by the camp, and tells us that not even the best of human governments is able, without force, to control human passion; that there is but one government that cannot be shocked, — that of heaven; but one power in whose protection we can find peaceful refuge, — the power of God. In God, then, let our supreme dependence be placed.

But, secondly, these national trials cannot be studied without seeing in them important political

as well as religious compensations. I have never, from the beginning of this melancholy struggle, been able to conceive of the great country included between the lakes and the Gulf, and the Atlantic and Pacific, otherwise than as *one*. All the analogies of other countries forbid its division, unless division be followed by war which would last until the one part or the other is politically cancelled. In no case in Europe do we meet with two contiguous powers, unseparated by natural boundaries, maintaining their independence and their integrity untouched. Between France and Spain the Pyrenees erect an almost impassable natural barrier, and, in addition to this, there is that moral severance arising from difference of tongue; yet France has, more than once, overrun Spain, and Spain has now sunk to a second-class power, virtually the dependent of France. In a still more active process of absorption, the principalities of Burgundy, of Navarre, of Normandy, were gradually so worked up into the body of the kingdom of France, by the mere energy of homogeneousness of language and contiguity of soil, that now even the old boundaries are lost. Through the same process Wales and Scotland were united to England, Norway to Sweden, Bohemia to Austria, Silesia to Prussia, and, in

the very few last years, Naples, Parma, Modena, and Tuscany, to the new kingdom of Italy. If, in some of these cases, the fusion was produced immediately by war, the principle is the same; for the only alternative to a peaceable union, when nature or art has erected no positive boundary, is, war to be continued until one party or the other gives way; and it is only by such boundaries, or by the joint guaranties of Europe's leading powers, that the smaller states of the continent are kept from immediate absorption in their more powerful neighbors. I do not say that this is right; but I do say that it is in obedience to one of those instincts of human society which it is as impossible to control as it would be to overrule that law by which the smaller particle gravitates to the greater, or the stronger force attains a supremacy over the weak. And peculiarly does this law seem to apply to this country, where there is not only no natural boundary dividing North and South; not only no dissimilarity in language, in religion, in historical antecedents, in general policy of government, — but where the two sections are united by reciprocity of staples, where the Mississippi couples the lakes and the Gulf by one main commercial avenue, and where the Alleghany and Rocky hills

divide the country into valleys running north and south. There could be no permanent peace, were an artificial boundary cut through interests which would thus have such interminable causes of conflict; there could be no peace, without political death, when peace involved a severing of the great arteries of national life: there can be no alternative, as I conceive, between a federal union of some sort, and a series of exhausting wars, which must continue until the one side or the other obtain an ascendency which is final and complete.

Nor do I see any answer to this, in the fact that such is now the antagonism between North and South, that a willing reunion under the same general government is impossible. Antagonisms no less bitter, — antagonisms often strengthened by difference of language, and of political antecedents, as well as by natural boundaries, which do not obtain among us, existed in all the cases of absorption I have mentioned; and yet, the great law of populations prevailed, and the contiguous lands were united. No execration of our own time could be more bitter than that with which the Welsh bards, as the prophets of Welsh patriotism, visited the English invaders:

> "Ruin seize thee, ruthless king,
> Confusion on thy banner wait," —

so they have been paraphrased by the poet Gray; yet Wales soon began to exchange institutions with England, and, under a common government, to be fed by, and to feed, its wealth. No wail could be sadder than that of the Scotch minstrel, singing, as it seemed to him, the dirge of Scotch glory: —

> "Old times are passed, old manners gone,
> A stranger fills the Stuart's throne;
> And I, neglected and oppressed,
> Long to be with them, and at rest."

Yet soon, not only Highland hate and Lowland suspicion died out, but the poet's melancholy at the loss of Scotch independence and the departure of Scotch royalty, gave way to as proud a loyalty to the new empire as ever was felt to the old clan.

If, five hundred years back, we should stand with Wycliffe in one of the cloisters of Baliol, we might hear him lamenting, as the chief obstacle to British union against papal usurpation, not merely the feuds between York and Lancaster, but the territorial division of the land among distinct powers. "Here," he might say, "to the west, protected by dense forests, and shut off by a barbarous language, lift up the Welsh princes a defiant brow. Between

us and Scotland rise the Teviot hills; but more impassable than these are the barriers of tongue, of habit, of bitter, relentless hate. It seems impossible," so he may reason, "that these barriers, so fatal to the true independence of this isle, should be removed; and yet, while they stand, how can the great cause of truth prosper?" So argued the wisest and most hopeful of Wycliffe's day, and of many a day following; yet the time came when these barriers sank away, and these warring populations were fused, under that invisible process of assimilation which territorial contiguity involves.

Or let us, as illustrating the fugitiveness of the passions of civil, as distinguished from international, war, go to the battle-field of Newbury, at the beginning of the great military contest between Charles I. and his parliament. Let us there listen to Lord Falkland, the purest and most unprejudiced patriot of the day; the one who most faithfully sought to preserve harmony by reconciling the two contending factions, and who now, in utter despair of that country he so much loved, and of that peace for which he so much longed, is about to throw away his life on the spot where the carnage is threatened. "He lives too long who has survived his country," so we can hear him cry. "I see England

finally and definitely divided into two hostile clans. I see the torch of civil war handed down from generation to generation; hatred has dug a pit between brother and brother which they cannot cross; hatred is to be the perpetual boundary-line which is to divide this people into two hostile camps; each element has in it much that is true; each is essential to England's prosperity: yet now, as it stands, I see only war until one or the other is extinguished, and unchecked despotism, or unchecked anarchy, rules supreme." Yet Lord Falkland's own sons might well have lived to see peace restored without either of these essential elements being extinguished; to see Puritanism and Anglicanism, Royalism and Parliamentaryism, each surviving the contest, to continue, by their own alternations and interchanges, to build up English prosperity; and to witness a final settlement, in which each element, divested of the fiercer passions with which it was once mixed, would vie with the other in loyalty to a constitutional king.

Nor, should we transport ourselves back to one of our New York or New England towns, at a period but a few years later, do we find political or social antagonisms less marked. New York acknowledged the supremacy of the Dutch crown.

New England acknowledged that of England; and England and Holland were then at war. New York held to aristocratic, New England to democratic, institutions; and besides these political and social differences, the two countries were inflamed by the fiercest commercial jealousy. Perhaps nowhere, even in that hard age of dissension, could be found two contiguous populations more utterly unlike, and more heartily disliking each other, as well as politically more thoroughly antagonistic, than those then existing in New England and New York. They were separated by far greater dissimilarities than now are North and South; and by equally bitter antipathies; but the Revolution gave New York and New England one government and almost one heart.

I see nothing, therefore, in the immediate animosities of any two contiguous populations to prevent the operation of the great law of which I speak; and, least of all, can I assign this effect to an animosity so sudden and recent as that now dividing North and South. We cannot forget that we are substantially one stock. There is scarcely a family which can go back three generations without coming to a common parent whose descendants are scattered north, south, and west; and, underneath this surface antagonism, which is none

the less bitter from the very nearness of those whom it now inflames, I do believe that there is in the American people a base of mutual affection and respect which will remain long after this strife is forgotten. In union were formed the impressions of our country's youth. The old man, whom you watch, retains his childhood's memories the most vividly; the old friendships, the old scenes, the old sacrifices, are what gave his character its final mould. And the old country will retain, I believe, its old memories, when the transient fever of the present is long past. It will look back to that infancy when its two sections interchanged their sons; when Southern soldiers rallied under a New England captain, to reclaim their soil from the invader, and when Washington's majestic presence first made a New England army feel the grandeur and the strength of a united land. This consciousness of community of blood, of community of history, of community of religion, of community, it must needs be, of destiny, lies at the foundation of the American life; and, fearful as is the present struggle, and resolute as should be our determination to maintain to the last the cause of authority and law, I see nothing in these, the divisions of the moment, that shows that, as to us, the great laws

of population are reversed, and that it is God's will that we should dwell apart. Once, it is true, in the world's history, God stretched a sea between two nations whom it was his will to separate; and at his command the path he had opened through the waters was closed, and the waves lifted themselves up to execute his omnipotent decree. But he has laid down no boundary line between the North and South of this American race, but, on the contrary, in the councils of omnipotence, has knit together its rivers, its mountains, its history, its lineage, its religion, in one. When, therefore, we read this decree of reunion on nature's face, and in the country's real heart, and the page of the divine economy for the Christian future, we may even now, in these shadows of war, see God's wing, and rejoice in the hope that we will soon again, though with temper chastened, and energies refined, and institutions ameliorated, possess a united land.

One or two practical points I will mention in conclusion. And the first is, that, as long as reconciliation is scorned, and a war for separation insisted on by those at arms against our government; and as long, therefore, as war is necessary for our own defence, and for that of our country and homes, we are advised, by every principle of hu-

manity and policy, that the war, on our part, should receive our united and unreserved support. "A great country," it was said by a master of statesmanship, "cannot wage a little war." Our own imperial attitude; the desire to spare unnecessary bloodshed and cost; the determination to avoid that border vindictiveness which marks a protracted and feeble contest, and the determination, also, if we must have war, to have war disconnected with personal hate, — to have, in other words, battle, not assassination; the determination to close, as soon as possible, the terrible suspense by which we are now overhung; — all these motives combine to urge us to collect our whole strength, and, in perfect union, so far as this immediate object is concerned, to stake everything on the result.

And this brings me to a second point, — the wrong of giving way to feelings or expressions of personal bitterness towards those against whom we are thus arrayed. In the last publication I have seen of one whom I shall never cease to love and venerate, but who believing, as I think wrongly, at the beginning of the war, that the Union was finally divided, took his stand on the soil to which he belonged, — in the last publication of the late

Bishop Meade, of Virginia, he quoted an old proverb, that we should treat our friends as if they might some day become enemies; and our enemies, as if some day they might become our friends; and he added, that while all our Christian life required us to reject the first part of this maxim, the same Christianity required us to accept the second. And I would add to this, that not only Christian feeling, but national magnanimity; not only national magnanimity, but public policy;— all these motives combine in teaching us to treat as those soon to become friends, those now marshalled against us as enemies. We should avoid, I think, not merely the language, but the temper, of recrimination, as prejudicial to our own success, — as forbidden by the first principles of the gospel we believe.

One other topic I cannot persuade myself to overlook. In addition to that care over our sick, wounded, and imprisoned soldiers to which the associations of this day so impressively call us, there is a special work of cardinal importance to be performed to that large body of the African race now thrown upon us for support. The question is not one of theory, but of fact. By the necessities of war, if not by our own voluntary political choice,

vast numbers of this docile and amiable but unhappy people have been detached from their old homes, and are now dependent on us, not merely for their daily bread, but for that practical education which will enable them to sustain themselves in their new condition. It well becomes us, on this Thanksgiving day, to consider what is due from us to this people, thus so solemnly consecrated to our care. And I do not hesitate to say, that this most delicate trust is one which we must make up our minds faithfully and religiously to discharge. We have now accepted the tutelage of this people, — a people whose capacities, great as the far past shows them to be, are to be recalled from the sluggishness into which they have fallen in the bondage of centuries; and we have accepted this tutelage, as one of the elements of the restoration of our own political power. We have invited them to aid us: their men have fought for us on the battle-field, leaving their women and children to our care: both men and women are ignorant of the art of self-support, as well as destitute of its means; and may God help us to do to them the right! And, among the elements of this right, let me mention, not merely temporary aid, but the determination to remove that prejudice which in

the North, and particularly at the North-West, refuses to receive the negro as part of the industrial energies of the land. If, in the present state of the country, — if, in view of the liberty we are giving to so large a part of the negro race, and the military debt we are accumulating to them, we do not remove this prejudice; if we do not receive the Africans to a free home, and to the full rights of labor in this our land, or, if that be impracticable, give them adequate homesteads elsewhere, — we shall, I think, be eternally branded as a nation dead to generous impulses, and unfaithful to the most sacred trusts. The question is not the political one of emancipating these particular slaves, for that is already done; but of saving those whom, for our own purposes, we have already emancipated from moral and physical ruin. To this work the intelligence and humanity of the country are most solemnly pledged.

And now, as we separate, I recur once more to the comforting thought which the text brings. As our difficulties multiply; as problems, apparently insoluble, — such as that which concerns the destiny of this unhappy people, to whom I have just directed your thoughts, — as problems, apparently insoluble, start up in our path, we fall back on

this great truth: that God, who interposes the cloud, will, if we trust in him, open the way. The future will bring its solutions, if the present only bring its faith. The very incomprehensible about us is a proof that it is God who is near, and who leads. It was a cloud that went, in the day, before Israel, as he marched from the land of bondage; but this very cloud, in the night, when Israel would otherwise have died, became lit with flame, and led him in the path of the right. On Sinai, God spake his law from a thick cloud, in the midst of thunders and lightnings, and to the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud: just as in the darkness and tumult of war by which we are now beset, he speaks to us. And even divine redemption is hid in the same shadow; and, in the moment when the Lord is transfigured before his disciples, "a bright cloud overshadows them," and from this cloud the Father speaks, "This is my beloved Son." Be this comfort, then, ours, — the comfort that God rules, and God redeems; and let this comfort give us a tranquil faith in God, and a resolute determination to perform those practical duties which in this emergency he prescribes. If so, it will be with no mere flutter of languid dependence, but in the courage of a determined and active heart, that, even in the

clouds of this Thanksgiving day, — clouds which though sunlit by yesterday's victory are still dark, — we lift up our voice in triumph, and cry, "In the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."

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